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**TURKMENISTAN**

## SUCCESS STORY

# It is Warm in Our School Again

**A USAID project helps a community address their children's education issues**



*Community members join their efforts to renovate the school's heating system.  
Photo: PEAKS*

***Training and support from the USAID Participation, Education, and Knowledge Program (PEAKS) helped a Turkmen community gain confidence in solving their problems.***

In Turkmenistan, the education system is in severe crisis. Quality is rapidly declining, infrastructure is deteriorating, and management is heavily centralized. Parents and communities, key stakeholders in education, have restricted role in decision making. The USAID Participation, Education, and Knowledge Strengthening (PEAKS) Project uses limited available opportunities to establish models for quality improvement and create momentum for development. While at higher levels progress is uneven, teachers and community members readily embrace the ideas and approaches promoted by PEAKS.

In 2005, representatives from Gyok-tepe School #2 visited Kokand, Uzbekistan to learn about community mobilization experiences promoted by PEAKS in rural areas. During the study tour, school representatives learned to organize communities around school needs, use participatory approaches in decision-making, and evaluate the impact of community initiatives on the school's physical and social environment. Upon return, the participants conducted their first Participatory Community Appraisal, which surveyed 80 respondents, including students, parents, teachers, and school administration. The assessment revealed that the priority problem for the school was its poorly functioning heating system. The system had not been repaired during the past 15 years. Lack of heating was causing up to a 50% decline in the students' attendance during the cold months, and both children and teachers were suffering from frequent cold-related illnesses. The issue was hampering school's learning achievement, which was already challenged by the state of the country's school curriculum.

To solve the problem, the community established a School Improvement Committee, which together with PEAKS developed a project proposal and secured a grant from a USAID's grant program, the Local Community Support Initiative. School administration, teachers, parents and local authority representatives were all involved in this process. With the funds, the community installed 12 heating boilers to generate heat for school's classrooms, workshops, assembly and sports halls. Over 860 pupils and 60 faculty now have comfortable learning and working environment. During the following winter, which turned out to be unusually cold for Turkmenistan, the school's attendance remained around 95% even on the coldest days.

To further improve school's work, USAID trained teachers in interactive education methods and assisted in creating a Parents' Committee, which has resolved to open a school resource center and organize extracurricular vocational courses for children. The collaborative work experience during the heating system renovation united many community members. People started to believe that if they work together, they will be able to solve many other challenges facing their community.